

Norton Says Democrats Will Get D.C. its Coin from Bill Introduced Today- January 10, 2007

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Washington, DC-Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) today introduced the District of Columbia and United States Territories Circulating Quarter Dollar Program Act, with Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA), Chairman of the Financial Services Committee, Del. Madeline Z. Bordallo (D-GU), Del. Donna M. Christensen (D-VI), Del. Eni F.H. Faleomavaega (D-AS), Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL), Rep. Michael Castle (R-DE), and Del. Luis Fortuno (R-PR). The bill would allow the District to put a design of its choice on the reverse side of a quarter and would give American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands the same right. Inadvertently, these jurisdictions were excluded from the Fifty State Quarter Dollar bill that gave each state their own coins in 1998. Twenty-one billion quarters representing 40 states have been minted thus far.

Norton expressed deep appreciation to Rep. Frank, the new chair of the committee, who reached out for the bill. "Always a strong supporter, Barney reached out to us to correct the sting of exclusion from small gestures that have large meaning for us as American citizens," Norton said.

In her floor statement today, Norton said, "Under the Constitution, all Americans are equal, notwithstanding important differences in form, structure and other significant distinctions... By including all Americans, Congress avoids any appearance of differential or discriminatory treatment and the implication that the District and these areas are colonies, never the intention when these jurisdictions were not included in the original bill in 1998, as the House has made clear by repeatedly bringing this bill to the floor."

This is the fifth time Norton has introduced the bill in the House. It has passed the House four times under suspension, but the bill has been blocked in the Senate. With Democratic-hold of the Senate, she is optimistic about Senate passage, particularly since one of the bill's previous Senate sponsors is Sen. Dodd (D-CN), the Chairman-elect of the Banking, Housing & Urban Affairs Committee, the committee of jurisdiction.

Norton's full statement follows.

For the fourth time, the House has passed a bill to afford five insular areas and the District of Columbia a quarter bearing a design of their choice on the reverse side. Inadvertently, these Americans were excluded from the fifty state bill affording this same right to the states in 1998.

We owe very special thanks to the successive committee and subcommittee chairs and ranking members on the Financial Services Committee. We especially appreciate the new Chairman Barney Frank who reached out to us to put this bill for consideration by the House on the suspension calendar.

Forty states have had their state design on the reverse side of the quarter with five more states to be added before this year is ended. All the coins are minted according to the year each state ratified the Constitution of the United States or were admitted into the Union. Although states have appropriate latitude, there are limitations as to what can be used as a design. According to Public Law 105-124, the Secretary of the Treasury has the final approval of each design. The law gives clear guidance as to what is an acceptable design concept. Suitable design concepts include state landmarks, landscapes, historically significant buildings, symbols of state resources or industries, official state flora and fauna, state icons, and outlines of states. Among the examples of suitable coins already in circulation are, New York's Statue of Liberty, Missouri's depiction of Lewis and Clark as they paddled down the Missouri River with the Gateway Arch in the background and North Carolina's design depicting the first successful airplane flight. We look forward to the day when the residents of the District of Columbia and of the insular areas can see similar symbols of their jurisdictions and of their American citizenship appear on coins as well.

This bill points out the importance of including all Americans in the symbols of American citizenship. The residents of the District and of the insular areas are full and equal American citizens. To leave them out of mere exercises of citizenship is to seem to deny the citizenship they revere and share with other Americans. The Americans who live in these districts have fought and died in our country's wars and have extraordinary records of service in the armed forces in considerably larger numbers than many states. District citizens, in addition, pay federal income taxes.

We in the Congress all represent proud Americans. There are, of course, significant differences between the states and the jurisdictions covered by this bill. However, qualification to be part of a program of quarter coins to commemorate congressional districts is not one of them. Under the Constitution, all Americans are equal, notwithstanding important differences in form, structure and other significant distinctions. Today, by including all Americans, Congress avoids any appearance of differential or discriminatory treatment and any implication that these areas are colonies, never the intention when the five jurisdictions were not included in the original bill in 1998, as the House has made clear by repeatedly bringing this bill to the floor.

Today, when our country is at war and faces unparalleled dangers, this bill is yet another example of our unity as Americans and our indivisibility in honoring all of our country's citizens. By repeatedly passing this measure, the House has made it abundantly clear that we are one country and that our hope is that the Senate will join us.